

New Identity

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[0 : 00] So who was it who said, be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind?

This particular philosopher has influenced the entire generation of children throughout the 20th century, Dr. Seuss. I'll auto-quote the great Oscar Wilde, be yourself, everyone else is already taken.

There's hardly a more pressing topic nowadays than the issue of personal identity. Who am I? Whether we are speaking about race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and how they shape the political culture or about our personal sense of self and how it informs our day-to-day life, the issue of identity, personal identity, is always there.

It hasn't always been that way. In fact, prior to the 1960s, there is very little discussion on the issue of personal identity anywhere in literature prior to the 1960s.

Accelerated social change has meant that the external frameworks for identity formation are constantly moving and so it is difficult to know who am I.

[1 : 45] The answer to the question, who am I, is quite elusive for our culture, our society in which we live, but it is not for the Christian.

Now, if you've just tuned in to us for the first time, just joined us, we just started last week our annual vision series.

We are in the New Testament letters of 1 and 2 Peter and we're looking at sections of those about what it is, what the Christian life entails.

Last week we saw that Peter describes becoming a Christian as nothing less than new birth, reborn, an entire new life.

It's as radical as having been dead and now alive. Total new life. Not just mere forgiveness of sin.

[2 : 46] That's not the Christian life in its totality, just forgiveness. It's an entire new life. Tire new priorities. Touches everything.

Now, but the new birth doesn't change who we are in all our ethnic, national, genetic, and socioeconomic markets, but it does change our lives in such a way that we are fundamentally different people.

And that's what this vision series is all about. We are building up our way up to Easter, the resurrection, the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity.

And as we build up to Easter, we are looking at what resurrection life looks like. How does this new birth, being reborn, rebirthed by Jesus Christ, how does it change us?

And today the issue is how does it change our sense of who we are, our identity? So if you're someone who takes notes, three points really today.

[3 : 59] What is the new identity? Being true to your new identity and power to live our new identity.

That's the three points. So the description of the Christian's new identity and life is in the very first verse of 1 Peter. In chapter 2 verse 11, Peter again describes Christians as exiles and foreigners. The word exiles that Peter uses here refers to a particular kind of person in the first century. The best way to understand the meaning of the word exile is resident alien.

And I don't mean when I say alien, little green guys. I mean, you know, foreigners. Resident foreigners, resident aliens. It means, as it describes the Christian's identity and life, it means that you're not a tourist.

You're not a tourist. You are certainly in a country that you are not a citizen of, but you are not a tourist of that country.

[5 : 26] You live there. You have, if you like, a working visa, so to speak. You are a functioning part of that society with a job, a home.

You've got friends. You've got neighbours. You are working for that particular country's good and you are paying taxes. On the other hand, you are not a citizen of that country.

Your home is elsewhere. Your citizenship is elsewhere. You have many things in common with your neighbours and your friends, but you don't share all of their values.

You don't share all of their customs. You are different. As a non-citizen, you are also not expected to stay there forever.

This is what Peter kind of describes the Christian identity and life is. We are resonant aliens, not tourists, but we are engaged, engaged to love our neighbours, to work for the good of our neighbours.

[6 : 44] Another similar word might be pilgrim. Pilgrim means that we are on our way home, but we are not yet home.

While there are so many fantastic things that happen when you become a Christian, for instance, you're pardoned, you're accepted, you have the praise of the praiseworthy and the approval of the one who is approved above all things, you are loved.

All those things that happen when you become a Christian are just the beginning. In other words, if you are a Christian, you do not live your best life now.

At all. Not even close to living your best life now. Becoming a Christian is the beginning.

And until we reach our home, we are exiles and we are pilgrims. So, first reality check.

[7 : 51] That means that if you are a Christian, your life will never be satisfying until you get home.

It will never, ever be satisfying until you get home. If you ever get to a point as a Christian, you go, I've got it.

I'm content. You have a problem in following Jesus. We will struggle. Things will never be just right. We will always feel frustrated that we are not changing and growing and dealing with sin. There will be empty times. There will be struggles. There will be frustrations all the way through the Christian life.

And it's because we are not home. We are not home. What's home for the Christian?

[9 : 00] Home for the Christian is where everything fits and works to satisfy the deepest longings of our souls.

In a similar way that our homes are like that. You know, you go traveling. You may stay in some great places, but you come home and go, ah, my bed. Oh, I know where the cups are.

I know where to go and grab that. Everything fits. It's ordered. But our home for the Christian is a place where the deepest longings of our souls are met.

Complete sanctuary. A place of complete love and a complete rest. And the Bible is filled with stories that tell us that we are exiles.

In fact, the whole trajectory of the Bible is one of coming back home. It begins with home. The perfect paradise, the Garden of Eden.

[10 : 05] We lost that paradise because of sin, turning our backs on God because ultimately He is our home. And from Genesis 12, God promises a new home.

And one of the great themes of the Bibles is being exiled and brought back home. Abraham, Egypt, Babylon. The Old Testament people of Israel are simply a microcosm of God's biggest plan, bigger plan for humanity.

The Bible ends. It begins with us being in home and then losing it and it ends with a perfect paradise of the new heavens and the new earth.

From creation to new creation. From one home to our eternal home. And the point is, this world is not home.

It is filled with death. We are always losing loved ones and we are always losing love. Now I understand completely that there and in this room even, that there are those who don't believe in God or the Bible.

[11 : 30] The irony of that is, if you think this world is all that there is, but you don't understand, you don't know why you are so unhappy.

You're fully convinced this world is all there is but you don't understand why you are so unhappy.

You are in exile and you don't know it either. If you think this world is all there is and we have, which is the dominant philosophy of our age, that we have evolved to fit this world, that's natural selection

and how evolution works, then why is the human race so unhappy? Why is it in so much turmoil? especially so when apparently personal happiness is the goal of life. How's it going for you? If this is the only home, why can't we handle death? Why is there a thing called grief? Why isn't death merely just the natural process of evolution? If we were adapted to this world, then you could love someone with all of your heart and it wouldn't bother you if they died.

[13 : 17] But it does and that's because this world does not fit humanity, does not fit the human heart, does not fit the soul. We are not home.

The Bible says the reason we were created was for fellowship with God, our Creator. Our true home is the loving embrace of our God.

Psalms 90 says that He is our dwelling place and until we are home, we are on a pilgrimage and things will never be the way that we want them to be.

Life doesn't fit. This world doesn't fit. There will be really good times and there will be really hard times. That is this experience for even the greatest, the heroes of the Christian faith.

life. That is who we are. That's our identity. We are exiles and pilgrims. So how do we be true to that new identity?

[14 : 29] What does that look like? How do we know we are living out that identity? It's important because I think there are two ends of the spectrum.

traditionally in Christianity in the way that we might engage with the issue of us being pilgrims and this not being our true home.

And we tend to gravitate in one way or the other. On one end is withdrawal from the world. On the other end of the spectrum is accommodation of the world.

The Christian is not identical to their neighbours but they are deeply involved in loving their neighbours. So one end of the spectrum is withdrawal.

That's hyper-conservatism. Down the other end is liberalism, just accommodation of the world.

Those of us with a Western heritage tend to have their identity wrapped up in personal achievement and accomplishment.

[15 : 37] On the other hand those with an Eastern heritage tend to have their identity connected to family, race, blood. When either of them becomes a Christian the source of their value, the source of their worth, their security becomes far more deeply grounded in being God's child than through accomplishment and achievement through the accomplishment and the achievement of God's son.

The achievement of God's family. Jesus Christ. Now what it means is when you become a Christian it doesn't mean you stop being Anglo, doesn't mean you stop being Asian or Hispanic or African, doesn't mean you stop being any of those things.

In the same way, it doesn't mean you stop becoming a truck driver, an accountant, it doesn't mean that you lose that identity. It means another identity comes into your life which is far deeper, far more crucial.

It means a Christian sits at a distance from the idols of their own culture because they give ultimate significance to the God of all cultures.

So Christianity is not a movement away from culture, it is a new way of living within it. The Christian's primary identity is not attached to their vocation.

[17 : 28] It's not attached to their achievements. It's not attached to their gifts, their personal preferences. The Christian is a resident alien.

They are the same and yet they are different. So how do we know if we're living that out? Have a look, flick over to the next chapter, 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 11.

1 Peter chapter 2 verse 11. Let me just pause there for a minute. I really value if you've got a Bible in front of you.

Because it's actually God's word that I want to preach here, not mine. You need to have confidence in God's word, not in the words that are coming out of my mouth. So you need a Bible in front of you.

It's one of the core values for us as a church. church. If you don't bring one to church, then get an app and put it on your phone.

[18 : 36] 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 11 and 12. Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul.

Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Now if we are living the exile life, two things are happening at exactly the same time. Have a look at these verses again.

Though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God. that is, if we are living the exile life, two things are happening. We will be accused, misunderstood, we will be offensive, we will be viewed as strange, we will be viewed as even dangerous in society.

[19 : 44] But others will see something different. They will see the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ being worked out through you and they will come to Jesus.

That is, the exile life at exactly the same time is both offensive and attractive. effective. That's the test of whether you are living the exile life.

We won't just attract people, we'll also turn people off. And we won't just turn people off, we will also attract people.

We'll do both of those things. when Peter mentions living good lives, he is alluding here to the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain in Matthew chapter 5.

And at the end of Matthew 5, or partway through Matthew 5, Jesus says to his disciples that they will be persecuted. And immediately after saying that, he talks to them about being salt and light in the world.

[20 : 56] Matthew 5 verse 16, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

In other words, what I'm saying there is, Jesus and Peter are saying exactly the same thing. The good life, the good deeds, is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about, the words of Jesus.

Now, you'd be grateful to know, we're not going to go through that verse by verse right now, but, know that in the first century there were at least four ways, four ways that the early church lived out the Sermon on the Mount in such a way that it was both attractive and offensive.

Four ways. And the four things in the first century that was both attractive and offensive, forgiveness, generosity to the poor of all races and cultures, the ability to face death cheerfully, and lastly, sexual chastity.

Christians were radically different than the first century world in those four ways. Strangely different and also radically compelling at the same time.

[22 : 18] You see, the Greco-Roman world was a shame and honor culture. If you were wronged in any way, it was considered honorable to take vengeance upon that person or that group of people.

And it was regarded that that was the way that society stayed together and worked. Shame on a culture. The Christian message of forgiveness, of turn the other cheek, of don't repay evil with evil, was considered unworkable at best in the first century and dangerous at worst.

It was going to upheaval, turn all of society. The core values and the principles of society. It was regarded as offensive. Forgiveness is regarded as offensive.

It still is today, but just not in liberal progressive societies. Sydney loves the concept of forgiveness. New York, London love the concept of forgiveness.

Gaza doesn't love the concept of forgiveness at all. Middle Eastern cultures do not preach forgiveness. It is offensive. Shame and honor cultures do not love forgiveness.

[23 : 48] But mercy and forgiveness is attractive to the recipients. Another thing, Christian generosity, the poor of all races, was regarded as strange in a shame and honor culture that gets its identity from family, race, and blood.

from the very beginning, Christians believed in the Bible's teaching that all people are made in the image of God, and therefore all have an inherent worth and value and dignity.

In fact, it is from that very Christian teaching that any concept of human rights arose. It did not exist. The concept of human rights did not exist before the Christian faith.

Christians also faced death with poise and cheerfulness because they had confidence in the future resurrection. No other person in the first century had that kind of hope at all.

At all. The Roman Empire could not understand, I've only been reading it in this past couple of weeks, could not understand how you can torture someone, torture them over and over and over again and they respond with grace.

[25 : 16] Could not understand that concept at all. The fourth area of impact and rejection was sexual chastity. The Greco-Roman culture of the first century didn't believe that the human body was important.

What mattered to them was the mind and the soul. So for them, sex was nothing more than a bodily appetite. You can see this in 1 Corinthians. Sex was nothing more than a bodily appetite.

It was a way of getting personal pleasure, nothing more. Christianity claimed that sex was a way of making a full and total life commitment to one other person of the opposite sex in marriage. Complete life. life. And it was absolutely nuts in a promiscuous first century. And yet, it was so attractive for the women and the children in the first century.

Before Christianity, they had no rights and all of a sudden, the Christian faith comes in and says, no, no, you have rights. you are not just a tool to be used for male appetites.

[26 : 35] That was a way, four ways that they were both offensive and attractive. The Christians were persecuted, they were tortured, they were killed because their views were offensive, but the Christian faith grew and spread and was attractive right across the Roman world.

In any and every culture, a group of Christians who live the new birth of following Jesus will be both offensive and attractive at the same time, but it will be in different ways depending on your culture. In every culture, it will attract you in some ways and it will repel you in other ways. That is the exiled life that Jesus has called us to.

How are you going with that test? Have you think about it? Too often, we are either offensive or we are attractive.

We are one or the other. Offensive because we're always talking about the faith, we're not offensive. That's all we ever do. We take every opportunity to tell people they need to repent of their sin, preach it out from the street corners.

[28 : 01] We're always tell, tell, tell, tell, tell, tell, tell, tell all the time, getting pushed back constantly. Or we're attractive, but we're not offensive.

We're attractive because we keep a low profile, not saying too much at all, live a decent kind of life. It is possible to be like Jesus in being offensive and it's possible to be like Jesus in being attractive. But Jesus was both. He wasn't one or the other, he was both. And it is also possible to be neither offensive nor attractive.

In which case, if you are neither attractive nor offensive, you're nothing like Jesus at all. You need to experience new birth.

to be offensive takes courage and boldness and to be attractive takes great humility and compassion. What's your next step?

[29 : 18] Do you need to grow in courage or do you need to grow in humility? Courage without attractiveness, courage without attractiveness is self-righteousness, attractiveness without courage is not compassion, it is not humility, it is cowardice.

Cowardice. And unfortunately in the Western world, too many Christians nowadays are gravitating towards cowardice.

So where do we get the power to live out this new life? That's my last point. The first thing is to never lose sight of 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

They are four very rich and loaded ways to describe the exiled Christian life. God didn't choose the Christian because they are the choice ones, but because of his love.

We are chosen by sheer grace. By sheer grace. As the last statement says, we are his special possession.

[30 : 47] We are his treasure. God has got galaxies. He has got galaxies upon galaxies that we have not even explored, but none of it means anything to him like the Christian does.

Do you know that kind of unconditional love and acceptance and approval? Has it captured your heart? Has it captured your imagination? Until it does, until it does, I don't believe that we will have real courage.

neither will we have real compassion and mercy and humility. If you want to actually know this kind of unconditional love, then you need to see verse 2, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

God, the source of our unconditional love is the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus, God the Son, was enjoying all the bliss of home, all the bliss of home, the ultimate home, dwelling eternally with the Father and the Spirit, enjoying perfect relationship and perfect love. But he left it. He left home. And he came into this world taking on human form and identified with us in our exile.

[32 : 36] The one who was home chose to be in exile. You won't read anywhere in the gospel accounts, the biographies of Jesus' life, where Jesus was out preaching and then he went home.

Nowhere. In fact, he tells his disciples that he has no place to lay his head. No place. He chose to be exiled from heaven and even when he was here, he wandered.

It was what he came to do. And at the end of his life, even then, he was crucified outside of the city. He was the ultimate exile.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Was his cry from the cross. He took the ultimate exile that we deserve so that we could be brought into the ultimate home.

And only when we fix our gaze on him, on him dying, that big death for us, so that we don't have to be permanently exiled from the presence of God, only then will we really have courage.

[34 : 07] Will we really have humility? He died such a big death for me. Why should I not die just a little death for him?

We are exiles and strangers, friends. If you've come to Christ, you are exiles and strangers. If you're not a Christian, you too are an exile, you just don't see it yet.

One of the things that struck me when I first moved to Chatswood nearly 15 years ago was just how few and how small the parks were in Chatswood.

And having young children at that time, these things are things that you think about. Needing to go to a park, regular requests, regular trips to the park, which were on the way to Bunnings.

And in fact, even to this day, as we drive past, I remember that one. I remember that park. I remember the swings there. I remember that. Parks were big.

[35 : 19] Great places to visit for downtime and relaxation. And frankly, we've had some great family times in parks over the years. But I've also seen some pretty horrid parks too.

In fact, I think of two parks that I visited where I immediately walked out. And why? Why? Because people had moved in to those parks.

Awful scenario where those parks were filled with homeless people. And what happens when a park is filled with homeless people? It quickly becomes unattractive, dirty, unpleasant.

very, very quickly. Very quickly. Parks are great places to visit, but a park cannot bear the weight of the full human life.

It can't do it. It's not meant to be a home. I use this simply as an illustration to point to a greater reality.

[36 : 39] If we really rely on anything more or love anything more or try to get significance and security from anything more in this world, then Jesus Christ and his salvation, those things that we are looking to, even if they are good things, they will never satisfy.

Because those things, whatever it might be, I talked about them last week, relationships, your career, your home, your travel, your beauty, whatever it might be, those things cannot bear the weight of the full human life.

life, because those things are never home. Only Jesus Christ is home. And so our prayer should be this, Lord Jesus, I want to live for you because you were exiled for me, I want you to bring me home as only you are able to do.

Thank you. Thank you.